TERRORISM-

IS IT

REVOLUTIONARY?

by Gil Green

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gil Green was born in 1906 and has been a Communist since he was 17 years of age.

He was the National President of the Young Communist League during the turbulent '30s and was a prominent leader in the youth upsurge of that time. He has been a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party for many years and was Chairman of the Communist Party of New York State, 1966-1968. He has held various other posts of responsibility within the Communist movement.

During the McCarthy repression of the 1950s he was convicted under the Smith Act on the charge of advocating the forceful overthrow of the government. He was a "fugitive from injustice" for over four years and then served an eight-year prison sentence at Leavenworth Penitentiary.

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Introduction

As violent repression continues to grow, the forces of "law and order" cynically attempt to shift the blame for this from themselves to their victims. We are told that official violence is but a reaction to so-called "left-violence." At the same time groups of young people, out of feelings of deep outrage and frustration, move over to anarcho-terrorist methods of struggle.

For both of these reasons the subject matter of this pamphlet is timely. It traces the Movement's position on violence and non-violence as it has changed and developed over recent years. Individual terrorism is discussed, not from an abstract moral point of view, but from the consideration of what is in the best interests of the revolutionary cause.

Lenin, the greatest revolutionary thinker and leader of our century, dealt with the relationship of ultra-leftist anarchism to right opportunism. "Anarchism,' he wrote, "was often a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins of the working class. Both monstrosities mutually supplemented each other." They certainly do in the United States today.

Right opportunism represents the far greater menace at

this time. It is the dominant trend in the labor movement, especially within the labor leadership. But within the ranks of the middle-class young radicals, anarchism is a tendency that cannot be ignored.

This pamphlet does not undertake to discuss anarchism as such, only its individual terrorist variant. This is not because terrorism has mass participants or a mass following; it does not. But it is a dangerous manifestation nonetheless, capable of great harm to the whole Movement. It disorients honest, self-sacrificing young fighters. It creates a disruptive nihilistic element inside the Movement. Above all, it feeds its opposites: it gives the liberals and reformists a freer hand within the mass movement and gives the ruling class the public legitimacy it seeks for a policy of increasing repression.

This pamphlet is a chapter extracted from a forthcoming book on Marxism, Anarchism and the New Radicalism to be published by International Publishers. Some questions merely touched upon in this pamphlet receive much fuller treatment in the larger work, while other questions dealt with at length in the book are not dealt with at all in this chapter.

The specific purpose of this pamphlet is to discuss the questions of violence and terrorism as they relate to the conditions of struggle in the United States today.

Gil Green

TERRORISM—Is It Revolutionary?

By Gil Green

1. "America—the Violent"

Violence is the topic of the day. The *New York Times Book Review* of Sunday, April 12, 1970, carried reviews of seven new books on violence. Titles ranged from "Our Violent Society," "The History of Violence in America," "America the Violent," "Violence in America," to "On Violence." Lewis A. Coser, the reviewer, notes that violence has replaced poverty as the current issue of concern—at least among publishers.

Prof. Coser disagrees with those who claim this country to be *the* most violent in the world. But no one can deny that it is one of the most violent. "England, Japan and West Germany are, next to the United States, the most heavily industrialized countries in the world. Together they have a population of 214 million. Among these 214 million, there are 135 gun murders a year. Among the 200 million people of the United States there are 6,500 gun murders a year—about *forty-eight times* as many. Philadelphia alone has

about the same number of criminal homicides as England, Scotland and Wales combined—as many in a city of two million (and a city of brotherly love, at that) as in a nation of 45 million."*

Our police are among the most brutal. An English bobby, for example, carries no gun, but in this country police often shoot first and ask questions after. It is also commonplace for crime suspects—especially when young, black, brown or Indian—to be mercilessly beaten and maltreated, with confessions wrung from them by sadistic torture, whether guilty or not.

Our history as a nation is replete with violence. The Indian peoples were subjected to genocidal slaughter and then herded into reservations to starve. The Africans were brought here in chains and have been kept in chains ever since. In the century since their "emancipation" more than five thousand have been recorded as lynched, i.e., wantonly and sadistically murdered by racist mobs. The frontiers of the United States have been ruthlesssly and violently expanded with lands stolen wholesale from both Indians and Mexicans. In 1898 the United States grabbed Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. The latter is still in its clutches and only Cuba is truly free.

The United States is the only country in the world to have used the atom bomb. Assuming the need to drop it at all—which we do not—some sparsely populated region of the earth could have been found to demonstrate the awesome power of the new weapon. Instead, it was deliberately and cold-bloodedly dropped on two of the most

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*Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Violence: America in the Sixties*, Signet Books, 1968, p. 43.

densely populated cities in the world. And in Vietnam today this country is guilty of a thousand Songmy massacres, for its policy and practice are genocidal. Nor is it accidental that its most barbaric atrocities are committed against colored peoples.

The history of class war in the United States is also one of bloody encounters. When a striker or demonstrator is shot or killed in a Western European country a great hue and cry is raised. In the United States it is taken as one of those things—another fatality, a statistic to be computed.

Two examples out of hundreds should suffice. During the short span of two years (1934-36) in which the great union organizing drive was gathering momentum, 88 workers lost their lives in strike struggles. And in the past two years, 28 young Black Panthers have been shot to death by police in so-called "shoot-outs" in which the shooting was nearly always on only one side.

2. From Non-Violence to Self-Defense

The issue of violence became a matter of widespread public concern following each of the savage political assassinations of recent years and especially following the fiery wave of ghetto rebellions. But the concern has not been all of the same kind.

Faced with mounting discontent and a growing radical mood, our rulers are concerned less with reducing violence by reducing or ending repression, and more with using the issue of violence demagogically to win popular approval for even greater repression. This is the true meaning of the "crime in our streets" issue.

Sure, there is growing crime in the streets. The causes

for this lie in poverty, joblessness, racism, and the highly profitable, police protected, narcotics traffic, as many must know. But the issue of crime is cunningly used to obtain the means for escalating violence. The size of the police force is being increased everywhere: millions of dollars are being appropriated to store more tear-gas, mace, shotguns, rifles and every which type of "anti-riot" weaponry; U.S. soldiers, the National Guard and U.S. marshals are being trained for "domestic emergencies;" the armed occupation of the ghettos tightens; and college and high school premises are invaded with the permanent presence of the police.

A new federal "anti-conspiracy" law is now on the books, aiming to prevent people from crossing state lines to participate in centrally organized demonstrations. Seven men have already been convicted under it.

The FBI is asking for and will get additional tens of millions of dollars to combat so-called "subversion." This is to be done by tapping more phones, bugging more homes, following more people, snooping through more waste-paper baskets and garbage cans, and infiltrating more organizations with more government stool-pigeons and agent-provocateurs. President Nixon's shameless efforts to pack the Supreme Court with the most racist, reactionary judges he can find are part of this same rush to greater reaction and repression.

The pretext for all this is the so-called danger of "left violence." Ruling class repression and terror are being passed off as protective counter measures, and not as the original and prime cause for whatever measures people do take to defend themselves and their rights.

It is true, unfortunately, that there has been an excessive

preoccupation with rhetoric about violence in a few sections of the new radicalism. There is also a recent inclination on the part of a small number of young people to play the dangerous game of individual counter-terror. Taking advantage of this, the media have misled a considerable number of people into believing that the source of violence comes from the left and not from the ruling class.

To see how unfounded this illusion is one needs but recall that the new radicalism started out as a movement dedicated to nonviolence, even to the extreme of turning this into a form of gospel. Despite hundreds of police and racist mob attacks on the early civil rights and peace movements, these were never met with physical resistance of any sort. Even when demonstrators and activists were illegally arrested they did not resist; they simply went limp, refusing to cooperate with the police.

In the South, violence took the form of organized murder and terror. The roster of young martyrs who paid with their lives is evidence of this. It was a terror perpetrated, directed, or aided and abetted by local authorities with the knowledge and connivance of federal authority. None of the much heralded civil rights laws made any substantial difference.

Violence was the order of the day. This was not the spontaneous violence of suffering black people against unbearable conditions, nor was it the violence of civil rights activists determined to defend their rights and their lives; it was the calculated organized violence and terror of responsible, respectable forces of "law and order."

Finally the dam of patience broke. The new radicals were compelled to reevaluate their basic approach to violence and nonviolence. It was amply clear that knowl-

edge on the part of the police and racist mobs that the Movement would not lift an arm in physical self-defense did not deter them from violence; it only spurred them to greater violence. The question therefore arose: Would not a policy of mass armed self-defense, publicly proclaimed, do more to curb cowardly attacks than that of meekly turning the other cheek?

The questioning went even deeper than that. As wholesale violence was being employed to hold back democratic reforms of a purely liberal kind, what could be expected from the ruling powers when demands of a radical kind were made? Experience had also taught an increasing number of the young militants that racism and oppression were endemic to the very nature of United States capitalism and could not be ended without ending the system itself. But this posed an even tougher question: If threatened, would not the system defend its class interests and prerogatives by *every* means at its disposal?

Thus the doctrine of nonviolence became challenged on even broader grounds.

Two additional factors led to this. The first of these was the war in Vietnam. This war was so patently an unprovoked imperialist assault upon the sovereignty of a small people that opposition to it on the part of the new radicals was instantaneous. It soon was recognized that while the war was *unjust* on the part of the United States, it was *just* on the part of the Vietnamese. It was impossible therefore to condemn the heroic armed struggle of the Vietnamese people on pacifist moral grounds. Morality was all on their side.

Another factor that influenced thinking greatly were the waves of violent ghetto upheavals that swept the country.

The combustible material for these explosions had been accumulating for a long time in the intolerable, humiliating conditions of ghetto oppression. The sparks that set them off were specific acts of police brutality.

Once again it became morally impossible to condemn these outbursts. People who face oppression and violence every day of their lives cannot be expected—should not be expected—to continue taking them. It was then that the issues of self-defense and the right to bear arms in this defense arose as questions of major concern. It was then too that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee began to fade into the background and the newly formed Black Panther Party came to the fore.

3. Violence as a Moral Question

The experiences of life itself, therefore, have helped make clear that the question of violence cannot be approached from a purely abstract moral point of view. The truth is that no one can honestly say that he is opposed to violence under every and all circumstances.

Let us take an extreme hypothetical example. A man suddenly goes beserk, gets a machine-gun and begins to mow down children leaving school. Who under these circumstances, would hestiate to stop him *by whatever means are necessary*? Who would dare to accuse the person who did this selfless act, violent though it be, of immorality? Would it not be the other way around?

The man or woman who saved these young lives at the risk of his own would be worthy of highest respect and praise. But he who failed to act decisively at such a moment of truth, and then sought to excuse this cowardice

on moral grounds, would be worthy only of utter contempt.

Although violence cannot be judged from an abstract moral point of view, there is a moral question involved. The violence must be justifiable; not alone to the individual or individuals who employ it—even the madman in our hypothetical example would somehow justify his actions to his own demented mind—but justifiable to others. Not justifiable to the class of oppressors and exploiters, but justifiable to the people.

Abe Lincoln was right when he said that the lion and the lamb can never agree on a definition of the word liberty. What is freedom for one is tyranny for the other. Justification for action in the eyes of the imperialist lion we therefore cannot and do not seek. Neither do we intend to be passive sheep. We propose to fight and to fight to win. For this we need the support of the people. That is why a correct approach to the question of violence is of such great importance.

No sane person wants violence for the sake of violence. Whoever finds pleasure in injury to others is sick, mentally and morally sick. He is a person drained of his humanity. Hence there must be good reason for resorting to violent means of struggle, and the blame for this must be clearly evident as stemming from the actions of the ruling class. Whoever appears to be sanctioning violence for its own sake, will lose the sympathy and support of the people.

In a recent strike of 1100 meat packing workers in the Iowa-Nebraska region, hundreds of incidents of violence occurred. Tires were slashed, homes and power-lines dynamited, men and women beaten. The company, the Iowa Beef Processors, Inc., brought hundreds of scabs into

the plant under the protection of the police and company thugs. Whatever acts of violence may have been committed by strikers were minor and insignificant compared to the violence of the company and the police.

Every worker who has ever walked a picket-line, been unemployed, or without food for his family, will understand that whatever violence these strikers were compelled to use in defense of their jobs and their livelihood was justifiable, while the violence used by the corporation and police to break the strike was unjustifiable.

When the ghettos erupted in the summer of '66 and '67, only a minority of black people actually participated in the so-called "rioting," yet the great majority of ghetto residents sympathized with them. They blamed the oppressive racist conditions and the police terror, not the young rebels.

Justifiability is not to be mistaken for legality. Laws are part of the superstructure erected by the exploiting class to institutionalize the protection of its vested property interests. Laws are therefore most frequently unjustifiable because they are meant to maintain class exploitation and national oppression. Justifiability is therefore only a moral issue in a class sense, in a political sense.

From a political point of view violence must also be justified from the angle of expediency. Even when the provocation may be exceedingly great, the gauntlet cannot be picked up every time the class adversary throws it down. Some people do not understand this. Their reaction is purely individualistic and emotional. They are outraged and want to prove their valor—immediately, right now. They care not what the consequences may be. They fail to realize that they are engaged in a war, a class war, and

not in a single act of combat. They are not Davids, who single-handed, with slingshot, are to kill the Goliaths of our day. Neither are they the legendery knights of yore who fought for personal love and glory. They are engaged in a struggle with a powerful and ruthless foe; they are fighting in a war, which like all wars, requires strategy and tactics to be won. Without such an outlook the Movement is game for any trap the other side sets.

The ruling class in this country is quite adept at setting many traps, especially today when it has learned from recent world history what people can accomplish once they organize, unite, and are guided by revolutionary ideals and a revolutionary strategy and tactics.

Sacrifices are inevitable in any struggle; so are mistakes. People respect and expect courage from those who would lead them. But they have no respect for those who provoke needless and senseless sacrifices. They admire daring, wish to emulate it, but run from folly like the plague. They will not put their fate in the hands of those who are more concerned with bravado than with what is best for the struggle as a whole.

There is still another aspect of this question. It is simplistic to believe that State power rests solely on police guns and soldier's bayonets. In the final analysis it does, i.e., when the ruling class and its State power have lost legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of people. Then the gun takes command. But society cannot live and function balanced on the terror of a bayonet.

Every ruling class and every government is concerned therefore with influencing public opinion, seeks to justify its policies, and endeavors to win a larger degree of popular support for itself. Those people it cannot win over

or bribe, it tries to confuse and demoralize so as to neutralize and make them passive. And it always aims to impress people with its own power and durability, that opposition is futile, and that the only alternative to itself is the deluge.*

In the United States the illusion that this is a truly democratic country in which the people have the determining voice is widespread. The government can still claim that its legitimacy stems from the popular will. It cannot claim this for every governmental policy or action—although it tries to do so—but it can make this claim for the character of the rule itself.

The situation here is quite different therefore from that in countries where there are open dictatorships and where the legitimacy of rule is already greatly undermined and constantly under popular challenge.

Bearing this in mind, the tactics of the movement in this country must aim to expose the true state of affairs, the exploitative class nature of our society and democratic institutions. These tactics must bring to light constantly the ruling class' responsibility for the violence of our times, whether in Vietnam, Harlem, or Berkeley.

The Establishment must never be permitted to get away with its hypocritical pose of being peaceful and democratic. Tactics that appear to shift the responsibility for violence and undemocratic acts to the Movement, are exceedingly harmful and even dangerous, for they not only

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*"We have always known and repeatedly pointed out that the bourgeoisie maintains itself in power *not* only by force but also by virtue of the lack of class-consciousness and organization, the routinism and downtrodden state of the masses."—Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 46-47.

bolster illusions in the liberality of the system, but legitimize its rule and its right to use even greater repression against opposition.

4. Does Repression Always Expose the System?

There is a mistaken belief in some circles of the new radicalism that increased repression is a good thing, should even be provoked, to more easily expose the oppressive class character of the system.

This is a dangerously mistaken view. Two things are forgotten: First, that a great deal depends upon how the repression comes about; whom the people hold responsible for it. Second, that repression does not lead automatically to greater militancy and resistance. Sometimes it leads to a feeling of hopelessness and despair and therefore to tactics of frustration or complete passivity, which accomplish nothing.

Fascism in Germany did not lead to revolution. It led to the crushing of the working class and revolutionary movements and then to world war. In Italy likewise, fascism remained in power for 22 years and then was overthrown by a combination of internal revolt and allied military invasion. And the problem of revolution in both Italy and West Germany remains unresolved a quarter of a century after the war. In Spain, Franco is still in power after 32 years with the aid of United States dollars and United States arms.

There are numerous historical examples to prove that the way people react to violence depends upon whom they blame for it. When Hitler took power in Germany, in January 1933, he did not take it by force of arms. It was

handed him "legally" by President Von Hindenburg—the very man elected as the liberal choice to keep Hitler out of power.

Representing at the time a declining minority of voters, (the Nazis had lost heavily in the preceding election), Hitler sought legitimacy for his regime in a new national election. To make sure that he would win required the destruction of the opposition and first of all the Communist Party. But this had to be done in such a way as not to boomerang against the regime itself. A way had to be found to make it appear that the Communists were responsible for their own destruction.

The way that was found was the deliberate burning of the Reichstag—the German parliament—and placing the blame on the Communists for this senseless act. A half-wit by the name of Van der Lubbe was lured to the site of the fire, "caught," and made to confess that the Communists were responsible for the arson as the signal for revolution. Georgi Dimitroff, the Bulgarian Communist leader in exile in Germany, and three other Communist leaders were framed up; a national hysteria was created; mass arrests followed; storm-trooper violence swept the streets; the people were bewildered and confused; the opposition was crushed; the elections were "won."*

Why did Hitler, the fascist, whose regime did rest on the guns of storm-troopers, police and army, still find it necessary to fabricate so monstrous a frame-up? The answer is clear. He sought to shift the blame for violence to the Communists and the left and in this way to divide

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*Actually, Hitler did not win a majority of the vote even then; he won a plurality, about 43% of the total.

and confuse the masses.

Another historic example comes to mind. In St. Petersburg, now Leningrad, in 1905, hundreds of hungry workers, including women and children, marched to the Czar's palace to petition him for bread. The demonstration was led by a priest, Father Gapon—later discovered to have been a police agent—and the petitioners carried their religious crosses and ikons with them. As they peaceably approached the palace the troops were ordered to shoot and scores of innocent people were slaughtered.

The purpose of this cold-blooded massacre was simple: it was meant as a warning to the growing discontent and unrest; it was meant to intimidate and frighten the masses. It accomplished the opposite effect. It did not snuff out the flames of discontent; it fanned them to white hot fury. It showed people how illusory was their hope that the "Little Father" would intervene in their behalf. It marked the dramatic opening scene to the revolution of 1905.

It is therefore true that ruling class repression can tear the veil from people's eyes and shatter illusions in the character of the system and the regime. But this does not occur when the violence seems to have been provoked and when repression is given popular sanction by individual acts of violence arising from frustration that cannot be distinguished from actions of agent-provocateurs.

We can come closer to home for historic examples to prove the same thing. The Haymarket Square frame-up of 1886 is one such incident. A bomb was thrown during a mass meeting of strikers of the McCormick Harvester Works in Chicago, protesting the killing of six strikers a few days before. The strike at the plant was part of a

nationwide struggle to win the eight hour work day. Chicago was the heart and sinew of the effort.

The bomb killed seven policemen and four workers. As a consequence, a nationwide hysteria was whipped up, the strike movement smashed, and the labor movement demoralized and set back for a number of years. The top leaders of the Chicago workers' movement were framed up on a murder rap; four were sent to the gallows, one committed suicide to thwart the hangman, and a number of others were sent to prison. The ruling class had achieved its objectives.

Six years later, when calm had returned, John Altgeld, a new Governor of Illinois, opened a new investigation of the bombing, found the convicted men innocent, and freed those still in jail.*

While frame-ups continue to occur, especially in the United States whose ruling class has been adept at organizing these over the years, the Haymarket frame-up was

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*Albert Parsons, the leader of the doomed men, speaking to the court before being sentenced, charged that the employers had organized the throwing of the bomb "to discredit the eight-hour day movement." A few years after the executions, Judge Gary, the trial judge, admitted that evidence showed that a man by the name of Rudolph Schnaubelt had most likely thrown the bomb. On Aug. 6, 1900, the Chicago *Daily Intelligencer,* in a careful review of the Haymarket affair, pointed out that all evidence "proved that Rudolph Schnaubelt was the miscreant who threw the bomb." Yet "at a time when the police were rounding up and imprisoning all anarchists and their sympathizers, Schnaubelt was released twice and allowed to make his escape [to Mexico] without the slightest interference by the police officials in Chicago." Nor was there any attempt to extradite him back to the United States.—Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement of the United States,* International Publishers, New York, Vol. 2, pp. 110-111.

more easily put over because of certain mistakes made by the workers' leadership. Most of them were German immigrants strongly under the influence of the anarchist-terrorist prophet of the time, Johann Most. They had engaged in a great deal of rhetoric about violence and boasted of the great "liberating force" that dynamite could be. They thought they could frighten the employing class to heed the just demands of the workers. As events showed, they only provided the ruling class with the intemperate words that lent credence to the charge against them, and thus helped bring about their conviction.

All this must be borne in mind today when a section of the new radical movement, small though it be, has suddenly become enamored with the old discredited panacea of individual terror.

Generations tend to go through previous stages of human thought in embryonic form in the same way that a human fetus goes through previous stages of biological evolution from amoeba, to fish, to mammal, to man. This is particularly so of the present young generation. It is growing up under such changed conditions that it tends to discard all lessons of the past until it experiences them on its own hide.

From this point of view one could say that the present fascination with the flame of terrorism is something that too will pass. It will pass, of that there can be no doubt. But the harm it can do before it does, not only to the individuals involved but to the Movement and struggle, is incalculable.

In 1901, four years before the outbreak of the first Russian Revolution of 1905, a section of intellectual, middle-class and upper-class Russian youth also became intoxicated with individual terror as the "new tactic" by which to

liberate old Russia. Lenin, who at the time had already begun his struggle to forge a revolutionary vanguard party that could coordinate and lead the fight against both Czarist absolutism and capitalism, saw in the rise of the new terrorist mood a threat to the further advance of the revolutionary movement.

"The question of terror is not a new question at all," Lenin reminded those who were arguing—as do some today—that the "historic moment" had presented "a completely new question—the question of terror." Lenin had good reason to know this. His own older brother, Alexander, had been executed in 1887 for an attempt to assassinate the Czar.

To those who called for a "change in tactics," Lenin replied that before one can change tactics it is first necessary to have tactics. "Without a strong organization skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times," Lenin pointed out, "there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illumined by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics."*

Lenin, the revolutionist, the Marxist, did not reject terrorism in principle. The movement is still uncoordinated and weak, admonished Lenin. The great mass of discontented people are still largely unorganized. "We, therefore, declare emphatically," he wrote, "that under the present conditions such a means of struggle is inopportune and unsuitable; that it diverts the most active fighters from their real task, the task which is most important from the standpoint of the interests of the movement as a whole; and that

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*Lenin, "Where to Begin," *Collected Works,* Vol. 5, p. 18.

it disorganizes the forces, not of the government, but of the revolution."*

What, according to Lenin, was needed above all else was a strong staff of "leaders and organizers." These the Russian movement of that time did not yet have. Under such circumstances, asked Lenin, "Is there not the danger of rupturing the contact between the revolutionary organizations and the disunited masses of the discontented, the protesting, and the disposed to struggle, who are weak precisely because they are disunited? Yet *it is this contact that is the sole guarantee of success.*" [Our emphasis—GG]

"Far be it for us,' continued Lenin, "to deny the significance of heroic blows, but it is our duty to sound a vigorous warning against becoming infatuated with terror." Terror can only serve as one of the methods of struggle in a period of decisive assault, but the time had not yet come for that. "At the present moment our slogan cannot be, 'To the Assault,' but has to be, 'Lay siege to the enemy fortress.'" The immediate task, Lenin emphasized, is "not to summon all available forces for the attack right now, but to call for the formation of a revolutionary organization capable of uniting all forces and guiding the movement in actual practice and not in name alone; that is, an organization ready to build up and consolidate the fighting forces suitable for the decisive struggles."**

Such was the advice given by the man who later successfully led the Russian working class to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the first socialist state. And his warning against infatuation with terror

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*Ibid, p. 19.
**Ibid, p. 20.

was written just four years before the time did come to make the first mass assault on the fortress of Czarism.

5. Changing Times, Changing Tactics

In the midst of the revolutionary events of 1905-6, Lenin's stress was different. In an article discussing the development of guerrilla warfare in certain areas of Russia, he took the occasion to more fully expound his views on how Marxists should view the question of forms of struggle. It is the clearest and most precise presentation of the subject in all Marxist literature and deserves to be quoted at considerable length:

> "In the first place, Marxism differs from all primitive forms of socialism by not binding the movement to any one particular form of struggle. It recognizes the most varied forms of struggle; and it does not 'concoct' them, but only generalizes, organizes, gives conscious expression to those forms of struggle of the revolutionary classes which arise of themselves in the course of the movement absolutely hostile to all abstract formulas and to all doctrinaire recipes. Marxism demands an attentive attitude to the mass struggle in progress, which, as the movement develops, as the class consciousness of the masses grows, as economic and political crises become acute, continually gives rise to new and more varied methods of defense and attack. Marxism, therefore, positively does not reject any form of struggle. Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at the given moment only, recognizing as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, inevitably arise as the given social situation changes. In this respect Marxism learns, if

we may so express it, from mass practice, and makes no claim whatever to teach the masses forms of struggle invented by 'systematisers' in the seclusion of their studies. . . .

"In the second place, Marxism demands an absolute historical examination of the question of the forms of struggle. To treat this question apart from the concrete historical situation betrays a failure to understand the rudiments of dialectical materialism. At different stages of economic evolution, depending on differences in political, national-cultural, living and other conditions, different forms of struggle come to the fore, and become the principal forms of struggle; and in connection with this, the secondary auxiliary forms of struggle undergo change in their turn. To attempt to answer yes or no to the question whether any particular means of struggle should be used, without making a detailed examination of the concrete situation of the given moment at the given stage of its development, means completely to abandon the Marxist position."*

We can see therefore how careful Lenin was not to close the door for all times to any forms of struggle, and not to close it for any specific time without first making a concrete examination of the historic moment and conditions. Yet he did not hestitate to slam the door shut on those who in 1901 advocated individual terror and became enamored with terror.

6. Confrontation and Disruption as Tactics

What about today?—not somewhere else on the globe, but right here in the United States under the

*Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, pp. 213-214.

specific conditions we face? Is individual terror justified as a tactic or not?

To arrive at a sound answer to this question requires discarding at the outset any abstract moral considerations. When we see what our ruling class is doing in Vietnam and the ocean of blood flowing there; when we think of the centuries-old oppression, misery and sorrow heaped upon the racial minorities in our land; when we remember the oppressive role of United States imperialism in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the rest of the world, surely any measures that would hasten the end of this damnable system would be humane and moral, for no amount of violence needed for ending it could compare in magnitude to that employed to keep it alive.

Nor can we permit emotional, subjective considerations to sway our judgment. Indignation and anger are powerful subjective elements that stoke the fires of revolt and provide drive for carrying on the struggle. But these cannot determine the nature of the tactics to be used. Nor can impatience and frustration do so, or the search for emotional outlets. Our determination must be based on a cool, unemotional, all-sided evaluation of the consequences of each of our actions with one single objective in mind—how best to advance the revolutionary cause; how best to bring closer the day when we can take U.S. imperialism by the scruff of the neck, for when we do it will be a day of rejoicing everywhere.

Remembering what Lenin wrote in 1901, we must first ask ourselves: Are the people of this country now ready to "assault the fortress?" Or is the problem still one of long range organizing, uniting, and giving articulation and consciousness to the mass discontent that does exist and is

bound to grow? To ask these questions is to answer them. No one can seriously contend that we in the United States today are prepared for the revolutionary storming of the heavens.

If this is so, do we not face a similar danger as that described by Lenin? Is there not the grave danger that revolutionists will become diverted from their main task of organizing and leading masses, thereby rupturing their contact with them, "that is the sole guarantee of success?"

Those who today advocate terrorist methods of struggle would not necessarily disagree with our estimate that the people in this country are not ready for revolution. But they would draw from this fact an opposite conclusion. They would say that this is all the more reason that something drastic, something dramatic must be done now, not tomorrow. Nor are they impressed with the argument that this may break contact with the larger mass of the people, for they have no confidence that the larger mass can ever by won for revolutionary change. Having no such confidence they want to shoot the works, even if it be just one giant fire-cracker.

There are some anarchists who believe that terrorist methods alone can bring effective results. They argue, and with considerable evidence in their support, that the powers that be are deaf to popular protest and that only where this is coupled with some form of disruption, or the threat of disruption, are they compelled to listen.

Every workingman knows that this is true from his own personal experience. Employers give raises and settle grievances not because they listen to reason, but because they always know that the workers can shut the plant down and with it their profits. Every so often they put this

to the test and compel the workers to go on strike, i.e., to disrupt production.

Students have learned the same thing in the recent years of student upsurge. The Urban Research Corporation, an organization formed to provide the Establishment with the facts about urban unrest, published "a study of protest on college campuses in this country during 1969." Analyzing all of the varied types of struggles that took place on the campuses for the first six months of the year, the study noted that at the end of that period "some 69% of all demands presented in all protests remained unsatisfied."

Then comes this revealing conclusion: "the more sustained the protest activities—the greater the success. For example, one-time protests achieved negotiations with the Administration in only 20% of the cases. But protests which lasted at least two days achieved negotiations more than 50% of the time. Strikes and building seizures lasting more than a week achieved negotiations in 70% of the cases.

"*So it would seem from the statistics that the radical point of view that institutions are unyielding unless threats of disruption are levied turn out to be accurate.*"* (Our emphasis—G.G.)

A case in point is what happened at Columbia University in 1968. To prevent a school gymnasium from being built on Morningside Heights—a recreation park area in Harlem—the black students supported by white students occupied a number of school administration buildings. This action became necessary because of the callous indifference

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**New York Times*, January 14, 1970.

of the college administration to the many petitions and protests asking that another site be chosen, and because the decision had been made to begin immediate excavation.

After days of confrontation, involving increasing support from the black community and a sympathy strike of the student body, the sit-in was broken by a brutal police assault. But the students had won their main demand—work on the gymnasium ceased. The park was restored to the community.

The lessons from these examples are evident. Disruption and confrontation tactics are inevitable where other means fail to get positive response, whether from corporation, educational institution, or the State. But these must be mass actions in this sense: that they articulate real grievances, set realizable objectives, and win the participation and/or the understanding and sympathy of large mases of people. Under no circumstances can they appear to be the artificially contrived gimmicks of confrontation for the sake of confrontation.

Numerous examples could be cited to show the counterproductive consequences of failure to remember this. The Columbia University sit-in was effective in winning its key demand and in educating people to the role of the university as both a servant of big capital and an institution of oppression in its own right. But when the S.D.S. leadership at the college took this to mean that it should organize confrontation as a permanent way of life, and sought constant disruption for the sake of disruption, it soon lost sympathy and support and shrank into a sect.

Likewise in respect to strikes. Workers will not support strikes for the sake of strikes. Every strike must have its own concrete realizable objectives. The idea of a per-

manent strike is only an anarchist pipe-dream. A worker must work if he is to eat and even the drop-out who refuses to work as "a matter of principle," can only do so by sponging on others as a matter of principle.

The notion of creating confrontation and disruption for the sake of confrontation and disruption is not identical, of course, with that of individual terror. Yet it is a slippery slide that leads nowhere else. It is a tactic so utterly tactless that frustration is its only product. Yet those who use it are so blind that they mistake their own foolishness for that of the masses. Thus, losing confidence in ever being able to win masses, everything seems to depend upon what they themselves will do. As single individuals and small groups can accomplish little without mass support, a stick of dynamite may help them at least sound big. One thing for sure, with it they cannot be ignored. They are important!

To throw a bomb at a bank, to burn down a building, to break plate-glass windows without cause, is not to conduct revolutionary activity but to play at it; it is "revolution for the hell of it." It does not raise revolutionary class consciousness, does not hurt the war effort or cripple the system, despite hallucinations to the contrary.

It is self-defeating because it creates sympathy for those who deserve none; is meaningless for it accomplishes nothing; and only diverts those who should know better from doing the less romantic, but the essential, slow, difficult work of reaching people, organizing them, and building with them a solid movement of struggle.

Sooner or later it ends up in tragedy. Innocent people get hurt, even if by accident, or the stage is set for another monstrous frame-up, such as were the Haymarket, Mooney-Billings, and Sacco-Vanzetti cases.

There are those, however, who actually believe that the system can be set reeling by terrorist acts. They believe that the high complexity and centraliziation of modern technology make society more vulnerable to disruption than in the past. Assuming this to be the case, what still is to be accomplished?

Is anyone fool enough to believe that the ruling class is incapable of protecting vulnerable points from *individual* or *grouplet* assaults? And what about the revolution in the technology of communication, of tapped wires, bugged rooms, and agent-provocateurs masquerading as the most militant of the most militant and demanding revolutionary action not tomorrow but even sooner than now?

Every recent arrest on a terrorist charge has uncovered at least one government agent who led in the wild talk and the formulation of fantastic plans. And it is still to be learned who was really responsible for the Eleventh Street, New York City explosion that killed three young people, and who it was that blew up young Ralph Featherstone and a companion in Maryland.

The only thing the young terrorists are "accomplishing," is to make it easier for the FBI, CIA, or racist-fascist individuals or groups to murder Movement people under circumstances in which there is such widespread confusion that no one can prove that the victims themselves were not responsible for their own deaths. What a field day this can be for those who wish to destroy the Movement root and branch!

7. The Use of Violence Within the Movement

Sanction for individual terrorist acts cannot be limited in scope; it sets its own limits that are limitless. Employing

these methods as the "answer" to the struggle against the ruling powers, they soon enough become the "answer" to the struggle within the Movement itself between contending ideological currents and political tendencies. In Los Angeles this led to the killing of two members of the Black Panther Party by a few members of a contending black cultural-nationalist organization. In New York City, one group of employees of the *Guardian*, the radical newsweekly, with the help of anarchist friends, physically stormed and occupied *Guardian* premises, ousted members of the paper's staff, and "liberated" it.

Unless methods of struggle of this kind within the Movement are rapidly and decisively put to an end they may set the Movement back for a long period of time. It must become an inflexible law within the Movement that force and violence can never be used to settle internal disputes. The law of the Mafia and the C.I.A. cannot be permitted to operate within the Movement.

This does not require toning down disagreements over ideology and policy. But the purpose must be to build the Movement, not to destroy it. Anyone who forgets this, who introduces into the Movement the gangster tactics of violence and disruption, must be treated as an enemy, for he is that whether conscious of it or not. Once again, anarcho-terrorist methods can only make it easier for the hand of the enemy to pull the trigger masquerading as the hand of a friend.

This tendency to use violence and disruption within the Movement is not something new in the history of anarchism. In 1869, a Russian disciple and close associate of Michael Bakunin, a man by the name of Sergei Nechayev, published a *Catechism of Revolution* which became

something of a handbook for terrorists everywhere. In this *Catechism* he defended the right and duty of revolutionists to operate without scruples whatsoever. He urged lying, stealing, entering into "suitable relations with prostitutes, with the police, with 'the so-called criminals,' etc." The guiding purpose of the secret conspiratorial organization he favored was "to increase existing evils in order that people may lose patience and may be stimulated to a mass rising."*

In that same year he helped form a conspiratorial society among Moscow students. One of the first acts was the assassination of a fellow student accused of treason because he had begun to doubt some of the claims made by Nechayev. An "additional reason for this bloodletting" is that Nechayev "desired to intimidate his own followers, to knit them more closely together, and to promote and spread the idea of pandestruction by the excitement which the murder would cause."**

Both Bakunin and Nechayev were accused by the General Council of the First International, headed by Karl Marx, "of having sent innocent persons to their doom in Russia" by exposing them to the police. "After his exposure Nechayev admitted the real state of affairs. He acknowledged openly and with the utmost impudence that it was his custom to compromise deliberately those who were not completely in agreement with him in order either to destroy

*It is not certain whether Nechayev wrote the *Catechism*. "Many regarded the *Catechism* as the work of Bakunin who never denied the supposition." It was also reprinted in Drogomanov's edition of *Bakunin's Correspondence*.—Thomas G. Masaryk, "Peasant Anarchism in Russia," reprinted in *The Anarchists*, Dell Publishers, New York, p. 470.

**Ibid, pp. 471-472.

them or to draw them into the movement completely. In accordance with the same reprehensible principles he would persuade people to sign compromising declarations in a moment of excitement, or he would steal compromising letters in order afterward to be able to exercise extortionate pressure on their authors."*

Referring to these nefarious activities of Nechayev, Engels wrote: "How far the Russian police is involved in this I shall leave as a moot question for the present . . . *Nechayev is either a Russian agent-provocateur* or, anyhow, acted as if he were."**

8. Heroic Acts to Stop the War

In referring to this tendency of anarchism, and in the first place its terrorist wing, to create a situation of disintegrating chaos in which it is difficult to distinguish friend from foe, we do not wish to impugn the motives of most of the young people who have become enchanted with terrorist romanticism. Many of them have fallen under this spell with the very finest of motives. They see the war in Vietnam continuing despite all that the mass movement has done to try to stop it. They feel that blow must be struck against blow. In the face of the wholesale bloodletting being perpetrated by American imperialism in Vietnam they believe that ordinary methods of protest are not enough and that everything should be done to try to stop it.

We deeply respect these feelings and we share them.

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*Franz Mehring in his book *Karl Marx*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, p. 464.
**Frederick Engels in a letter to Theodor Cuno, reprinted in *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* of Marx and Engels, Anchor Books, New York, 1959, p. 445.

These are not ordinary times and ordinary methods of struggle are *not* enough. But neither can gestures—not even wild gesticulations—provide a substitute. Whatever we do must have a purpose, an objective, must fit into a strategy. We cannot help the Vietnamese if we play into the hands of imperialism. We cannot help the Vietnamese if it is made easier for the ruling class to smash the Movement. We cannot help the Vietnamese if the mass Movement against the war declines, if people become demoralized, if the fight is narrowed down to the actions of a handful of individuals, self-sacrificing and heroic though they may be.

There must be more, not less, bold and heroic acts against the war, both individual and mass. But these must serve a purpose. They must help focus greater public attention on the war, further clarify the issues involved, and not permit the discussion to be sidetracked and diverted into irrelevant channels. The result must be ever greater revulsion to the war, ever greater activity against it, and ever greater difficulties for its prosecution.

We are all for the heroic acts of young people in resisting the draft or in refusing to go or fight in Vietnam. If GIs acted to stop the war machine, if longshoremen refused to load arms ships, if seamen refused to sail them, if workers refused to produce planes, tanks and munitions, these would be meaningful acts of heroism understandable by all and would indeed mark a decisive turning point in the war.

We can understand why some people are tired of repeating the same kind of protest demonstrations against the war. But we reject the view that these actions do no good. It is generally acknowledged that a majority of the people

want an end to the war. The mighty mass demonstrations against it have certainly contributed toward this, showing people that they were not alone in their doubts or opposition. Even the fact that Nixon is compelled to promise the withhdrawal of more men from Vietnam, no matter what his intentions may be, is an indication of how he fears public opinion and desires to placate it. And to the extent that he reneges on his promises it is possible to arouse even more people against the war, against the Administration, and against the system responsible for it.

Since the large-scale military invasion of Vietnam began in 1965, a peace movement has developed in this country more massive and militant than anywhere else in the world, and with growing anti-imperialist consciousness. To think this is nothing, has accomplished nothing, is to make a terribly tragic error of judgment.

The big task is to spread and build this movement, especially among the workers. They feel the economic effects of the war and more and more are becoming increasingly restive under them. It is now possible to make the war an issue of debate and action within the labor movement, and to show the direct relationship between inflation, high taxes, poor housing, pollution and urban decay, and the cost of militarism and war. The increasingly youthful composition of the labor movement also is a positive factor, for the young have been against this war more than any other age bracket.

When the first shop, plant, mine, mill, ship or dock closes down in protest to the war—even if only for a day—this will add an ingredient to the anti-war movement a thousand times more effective than the hit and run tactics of smashing windows or throwing bombs.

9. Guerrilla Warfare

A misreading of current world history has contributed to lending credence to the mistaken view that small handfulls of intrepid individuals can somehow replace the masses in the making of revolution.

In Cuba, a small courageous group led by Fidel Castro did start the guerrilla war. But what is forgotten is that it had the sympathy of the great majority of the people and the active aid of the peasantry in the agrarian areas of guerrilla combat. What is also forgotten is the relatively high level of consciousness among the workers, the result of decades of Communist work and influence. Without this, the small band could not have survived a fortnight, let alone grown into a mighty liberating force.

The Batista regime was a brutal, oppressive, armed dictatorship. It served the interests of American imperialism and its Cuban lackeys. Its stable of venal, corrupt, bootlicking politicians only further enhanced its general unpopularity. What was needed under the circumstances was not just exposure of the regime, for it already stood naked in the public eye. What was needed was to show the masses how the military dictatorship could be overthrown by the only means that could do so—armed combat. This Castro did. History attests to the correctness of his judgment and his action.

But where a regime still has legitimacy in the eyes of the people, where it appears to be ruling by popular mandate, armed struggle—whether the guerrilla or the individual terrorist kind—cannot bring about revolution, only its reverse.

Che Guevara, in an article, "Lessons of the Cuban

Revolution," made this point crystal clear. He sharply castigated those who believe "that against a professional army nothing can be done, who sit down to wait until in some mechanical way all necessary objective and subjective conditions are given [for revolution] without working to accelerate them."

But he did not stop there. He went on to point out that "a necessary minimum" of conditions is required, without which success is impossible. "People must see clearly the futility of maintaining the fight for social goals within the framework of civil debate," he wrote, and added:

> "Where a government has come to power through some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, the guerrilla outbreak cannot be promoted, since the possibilities of peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted."*

Whether failure to remember this was a factor that led to the Bolivian tragedy in which this brilliant, heroic revolutionary leader gave his life, history will have to judge. As for the United States, the meaning of Che's words is self-evident. We can neither sit back and wait passively for things to change, nor can we adopt forms and methods of struggle for which a necessary minimum of conditions do not exist. In the United States there is no military dictatorship, the government has come to power by popular vote, and the possibilities of peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted.

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*"Lessons of the Cuban Revolution," by Ernesto Che Guevara, reprinted in *Guerrilla Warfare and Marxism*, by William J. Pomeroy, International Publishers, New York, 1968, pp. 287-288.

10. Are Guns the Liberator?

It is also necessary to say something about Mao's slogan, "All power grows through the barrel of a gun." If by this catchphrase is meant that victory in armed combat is determined by armed means, or that state power when defended by arms must be vanquished by arms, these are somewhat oversimplified generalizations, but we can let them pass. But the slogan has been popularized and used in another way that is extremely harmful.

Guns are seen as the great liberator. But guns do not make revolutions; people do. To glorify guns, to stress and overstress them, is to make oneself a prisoner of rhetoric that becomes a roadblock to reaching and organizing people. Sometimes it is even seen as an alternative to this. Also it enables the ruling classs to frighten masses with the spectre of armed violence coming from the Left, enabling it thereby to more easily get away with its own murderous assaults, especially on young black radicals.

Speaking of this problem, Gus Hall, General Secretary of the Communist Party, has noted that whether or when to use guns is not a question of principle, but of tactics. "It seems to me that whether the people have guns in their homes is not the issue. I think most Americans do. Also, the right to self defense is not the issue here. As police brutality increases, the right of self defense will grow in importance. But the advocacy of the slogan, 'Pick up the gun,' is another matter." What would be the result of such a tactical slogan? he asks. Would it get mass response? Would it in fact result in self defense? "I do not think so. It would result only in individual actions, if any," and it would "alienate" larger masses "who are moving into struggle."*

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*From speech delivered to founding convention of Young Workers' Liberation League, February, 1970.

The big job, whether in the ghettos or elsewhere, is to organize the people and give them leadership. This must include the right of armed self-defense against police or racist violence, and the organization of *mass* self-defense by a variety of means. But under no circumstances should the readiness of individuals to defend themselves and their communities with guns become a substitute for what is most important—the organization of the people of the community themselves.

Another influence that has served to feed terrorist thinking has been the impact of the movie, "The Battle of Algiers." This dealt with organized terrorist acts within the city of Algiers during the Algerian War for national liberation from French rule.

An attempt has been made to mechanically transpose the conditions of Algeria to the United States, and to see the black and minority peoples as playing the role of the Algerian guerrillas with the support of white revolutionists.

There is something terribly wrong in this comparison. In the first place, the movie itself distorts the actual situation. It never shows the terrorist acts in the city of Algiers as part of a national war of liberation in which guerrilla armies were fighting the French army in the countryside. Secondly, the terrorist activities in the city of Algiers had as their purpose the creation of conditions in which the French would have to leave the country, no longer able to live, function, or continue to make profit in it.

But in Algeria nine-tenths of the population was native and only one-tenth was French colonialist. It was possible to drive the French minority out, but is there anyone crazy enough to suggest that the objective of black liberation is to drive the white majority out of this country? Further-

more, in Algeria the working class was nearly all native; in the United States it is black, brown and white.

In the United States, unlike Algiers, the system cannot be overthrown by the black, brown and other minority peoples alone. It can be done only by the working class as a whole.

Any viewing of the Algiers struggle as a model for the United States could only mean a race war. The white ruling class would be the gainer and the struggle of both the black people and the working class would be set back for generations.

There is something reprehensible in this attempt of some confused white young terrorists to put the black people in the role of the Algerians. It is to ask the black people to make the revolution for all of us, which from the point of view of this writer smells of racism.

Nor should those who romanticize the Algerian struggle forget one truth that the movie did bring out: the terrorist organization in Algiers was infiltrated by the police; its members were all caught and executed.

* * *

In the ranks of young radicals there is a great deal of admiration for the way in which the Vietnamese people have astounded the world with their ability to fight and to win against a power that seemed militarily invincible. But what they fail to see is that this "miracle" is the product of many years of tireless work and could not have been possible without winning the support of and drawing the people themselves into the struggle.

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